Veeam's Enterprise Scalability Helps Baloise To Make Its "Simply Safe" Strategy happen

"Veeam keeps all critical systems available 24.7.365. We meet SLAs with our business units, they deliver innovative offerings to our customers and Baloise maintains an edge over competitors."

— Markus Marksteiner
    Head of Infrastructure & Support, Group CTO
    Baloise Group

INDUSTRY

Financial services

ORGANISATION

The Baloise Group is a European provider of insurance and pension solutions in Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland, where the company offers a combination of insurance and banking services. With Swiss origins dating back to 1863, Baloise is headquartered in Basel and employs 7,400 people.

THE BUSINESS CHALLENGE

For more than 150 years, Baloise has made its customers safe. Baloise is a leader in its field because the company provides a smart combination of insurance policies and innovative safety solutions. Baloise's unique selling proposition is reflected in the new simply safe strategy — products and services that go beyond traditional insurance — delivers positive results and gives Baloise a competitive edge.

Safety solutions are wide-ranging. Customers who purchase a homeowners' insurance policy receive a security box containing several items, including a smoke detector, fire blanket and surge protector. Customers who purchase car insurance policies are offered an in-car safety-training course to learn defensive driving techniques and earn policy discounts. Customers who experience a difficult circumstance, such as a robbery or death, are offered psychological assistance.

The IT systems supporting these customer-facing products and services must be available 24.7.365 for Baloise to retain a competitive edge. Backend systems must be available around the clock as well to support business operations (SAP, business intelligence software and insurance and banking applications). If critical systems are not available all the time, customers in crisis can't access online services, such as customer service assistance and mobile banking. Without 24.7.365 Availability, Baloise risks brand damage and customer loss.

To avoid these risks, the company restructured its disaster recovery (DR) strategy in 2015. Prior to 2015, Baloise backed up between two data centers in Basel and copied backups to a third data center in Zürich. If one or both of the Basel data centers failed, critical systems could be restored from backup copies in Zürich.

The possibility of both Basel data centers failing is relatively high because Basel is located in a high-risk earthquake zone. The largest earthquake in Switzerland's recorded history occurred in Basel in 1356 and measured 6.6 on the Richter magnitude scale. The Swiss Seismological Service estimates an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.5 to 7 will occur every 1,500 years.

For these reasons, Baloise decided it was smarter to replicate data from Basel to Zürich because failing over to replicas is faster for business continuity. If an earthquake hits Basel and both data centers are destroyed, Baloise can fully recover data quickly from replicas in Zürich. However, one challenge remained.

"Legacy backup was old-fashioned," said Markus Marksteiner, Head of Infrastructure & Support and Group CTO at Baloise. "Legacy backups didn't provide replication, and even if it did, it lacked the enterprise scalability required to back up, replicate and restore 1,400 VMs fast enough for us to meet service level agreements (SLAs) with business units."

CHALLENGE

Baloise became a market leader by deliberately moving beyond the role of a traditional insurance company and creating a prevention strategy to help customers avoid risks. The strategy includes programs and services that bring safety within customers' reach. The offerings must be available 24.7.365 for Baloise to retain a competitive edge.

To avoid downtime, Baloise decided to replicate VMs from its Basel data center to a new data center in Zürich, but legacy backup didn't provide replication. Legacy backup also lacked the enterprise scalability required to back up and restore 1,400 VMs fast enough to ensure safety offerings are available 24.7.365.

SOLUTION

Veeam Availability Suite

Veeam delivers 24.7.365 Availability of safety offerings (and all critical systems), helping Baloise maintain its competitive edge. Veeam helps Baloise stay agile and respond quickly to changes in the market — another competitive edge. Veeam backs up 1,400 VMware vSphere virtual machines (145TB) and replicates approximately 650 business-critical VMs from Basel to Zurich.

THE VEEAM SOLUTION

With the "Simply Safe" Strategy Baloise goes beyond traditional insurance and Veeam® Availability Suite™ helps the company deliver on that promise by ensuring critical systems are always running.

"Veeam keeps all critical systems available 24.7.365," Marksteiner said. "We meet SLAs with our business units, they deliver innovative offerings to our customers and Baloise maintains an edge over competitors."

Because critical systems are available at all times Baloise's IT infrastructure is agile and can respond to changes in the market quickly — another competitive edge.

"Everything we do is aimed at safety," Marksteiner explained. "By staying agile, Baloise can create new safety solutions quickly to meet the changing needs of customers. For example, when a customer app we created in collaboration with the University of Luxembourg became extremely popular, we transformed it into a safe-driving program. We were able to do that because Veeam keeps our IT infrastructure agile and affords us time. We spend 50 percent less time on backup because Veeam is so easy to use, saving us 20 hours per week."

Two of Marksteiner's colleagues who use Veeam agree.

"Veeam is easy to use because the user interface is intuitive," said Fabio Sandmeier, Systems Engineer. "With just a few clicks, we can restore an entire server almost instantly. Veeam also allows us to be proactive, which was unimaginable with legacy backup. Veeam monitoring alerted us to a cluster going offline, making it impossible for 1,500 employees in a branch office to work online. Just one hour of downtime in a single office could cost the company €500,000."

Veeam was more affordable than legacy backup, saving nearly €200,000 per year.

"Veeam supports our IT processes perfectly," said Jean Döscher, Infrastructure Architect. "As an infrastructure architect, I'm very satisfied with the solution because our systems are always available. In a failure situation, we can bring systems up so fast that customers aren't impacted. Veeam also gives a clear roadmap for our cloud strategy. Veeam Cloud Connect will be our conduit for storing backup copies in Microsoft Azure, and Veeam Availability Orchestrator will orchestrate, test and report on DR."

Veeam plays another role in Baloise's future.

"The company is on course to attract an additional 1 million customers by 2021," Marksteiner said. "Enterprise scalability and 24.7.365 Availability are essential to our success."

RESULTS

Ⓥ Supports innovation, competitive edge and brand promise

Ⓥ Strengthens DR strategy and saves nearly €700,000

Ⓥ Reduces backup management time by 50 percent

ABOUT VEEAM SOFTWARE

Veeam® has pioneered a new market of *Availability for the Always-On Enterprise*™ to help companies solve the challenges of keeping their businesses up and running at all times. Veeam enables the Always-On Business™ with solutions that provide recovery time and point objectives (RTPO™) of less than 15 minutes for virtualized applications and data.

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THE RESULTS

- **Supports innovation, competitive edge and brand promise**
  "Innovation is what gives Baloise a competitive edge," Marksteiner said.
  "To be innovative, we have to be extremely agile so we can respond to market changes quickly. To be extremely agile, our IT infrastructure has to be available 24.7.365. Veeam delivers 24.7.365 Availability, making it easier for Baloise to implement its Simply Safe Strategy

- **Strengthens DR strategy and saves nearly €700,000**
  "Veeam provides what legacy backup couldn't: replication and the enterprise scalability required to keep our systems running all the time," Sandmeier said. "Saving money was an unexpected bonus."

- **Reduces backup management time by 50 percent**
  "Between Instant VM Recovery® and monitoring, we save 20 hours a week with Veeam," Döscher said. "Veeam gives us time to test new products that will keep our customers safe."

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